

THE EVENING STAR

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The Federal Spotlight

House Panel Seeking Evidence of Snooping

By JOSEPH YOUNG
Star Staff Writer

Invasion of privacy, anyone? The House Civil Service Employees Benefits subcommittee is desperately searching for government employees who can furnish specific cases of agencies' snooping into their personal affairs or coercing them into making charity contributions, purchasing U.S. Savings Bonds or participating in political or outside activities.

The subcommittee's problem is simple but perplexing. It would like to go along with the Senate in approving a bill protecting employee rights, but in view of the House's past opposition to such a measure it needs

specific cases to bolster the bill's chances. But it can't find any.

The government employee unions aren't much help.

All But the Names

In testimony they cite horrible examples of agencies delving into employees' sex lives, financial affairs, religious and political beliefs, and so on. Employees are described as being forced to contribute to political campaigns, purchase Savings Bonds and engage in civil rights and other community action programs.

But no names are given, no specific cases are cited.

In exasperation, Rep. Law-

rence Hogan, R-Md., who usually is on the side of government employees told union witnesses, "You are dealing in generalizations and not with specifics. Up to this point we haven't had one specific case cited to us."

Hogan noted that he represents tens of thousands of federal employees in his nearby district and during his 2½ years in Congress "not one complaint have I received on invasion of privacy." Hogan said his office is bombarded with various other kinds of complaints from government workers regarding their employment.

He was joined by Rep. James Hanley, D-N.Y., chairman of the subcommittee, who favors a bill

to strengthen federal employee rights but who gently told the union witnesses "If we don't document our cases, this will be a difficult bill to sell to the House."

Employee leaders said most of the cases that have come to their attention in recent years have been sent to Sen. Sam Ervin, D-N.C., who initiated the legislation in the Senate. Further, they said, they hesitate to identify employees because of possible retaliation by their agencies.

The union leaders conceded that there has been a drop in invasion of privacy complaints on the part of their members. They credited this to Ervin's

widespread investigations and the agencies' backing down accordingly. But they said that if such legislation is not enacted by Congress, the agencies will be back to their old tricks and invasion of privacy will be intensified.

House subcommittee members appear skeptical. "We are dealing with faceless accusers," Hogan said. Thus, unless government employees come forward with specific complaints, the bill's chances appear dim.

Consequently, the subcommittee would welcome specific complaints from employees, who are guaranteed that their identities will be kept confidential. They are invited to write to the House

subcommittee, Room 207, Cannon Office Building, The Capitol, Washington, D.C. 20515.

The subcommittee feels this should tell whether it is dealing with a phantom issue or not.

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GROUP TRAVEL OKAYED — The General Accounting Office has approved group air travel by federal employees on official assignments because of substantial savings achieved through such arrangements.

The GAO's decision came in connection with travel orders for a group of government scientists to attend the general assembly of the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics in Moscow.

FILL 'ER UP — The Federal Register sometimes is filled with fascinating information.

Such as the item in which the Civil Service Commission gives permission to civilian employees at the Army Depot at Tooele, Utah, to serve as part-time night bartenders at the base. It seems that the installation is too remotely located to hire regular bartenders, so civilians there can hold a second job as part-time bartenders without violating the law which prohibits employees from working at two government jobs.

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